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**STRATEGIC STUDIES INSTITUTE
US ARMY WAR COLLEGE
Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania**

**MEXICO'S CENTRAL AMERICAN POLICY:
APOLOGIES, MOTIVATIONS, AND PRINCIPLES**

by

Edward J. Williams

15 March 1982

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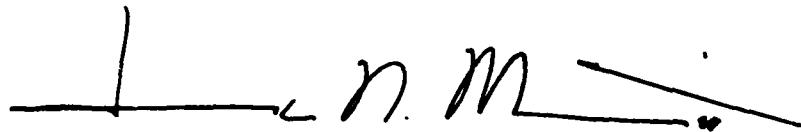
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FOREWORD

This memorandum posits and critically analyzes several apologies, motivations, and principles contributing to Mexico's increasingly active foreign policy role in Central America. It sets out a series of explanations, including those typified as sociocultural, historical, ideological, economic, political, and strategic/security. In each case, the author proposes the argument and then exposes it to analysis, featuring its strengths and weaknesses. The several categories define distinct and distinguishable parts of the larger foreign policy matrix and their proposition and elucidation contributes to an enriched understanding of the formulation and articulation of Mexican policy in Central America. In this effort, the author is not essentially concerned with the substance of Mexico's Central American policy, but rather with the motivations and principles informing the policy (or policies) and the apologies devised to explain Mexico's activities in the region.

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This memorandum was prepared as a contribution to the field of national security research and study. As such, it does not reflect the official view of the College, the Department of the Army, or the Department of Defense.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'J. N. M.', is written over a horizontal line. The signature is stylized and fluid.

JACK N. MERRITT
Major General, USA
Commandant

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH OF THE AUTHOR

DR. EDWARD J. WILLIAMS is Professor of Political Science at the University of Arizona. Currently, he is a Visiting Research Professor with the Strategic Studies Institute. He holds a bachelor's and master's degree in political science from Duquesne University, and earned a Ph.D. in the same field from Johns Hopkins University. Dr. Williams is the author of *The Rebirth of the Mexican Petroleum Industry: Developmental Directions and Policy Implications* (1979), *Political Themes of Inter-American Relations* (1975), and *Latin American Christian Democratic Parties* (1967). In addition, he has co-authored two additional books and his articles have been published in several professional journals.

SUMMARY

As Mexico's role as an important political actor has grown in the Central American region, official and unofficial sources have posed a series of apologies and explanations designed to justify Mexico's intrusion into the area. The contextual influences informing Mexico's contemporary Central American policy derive from sociocultural attachments and historical bonds. Although a sense of self-indulgent myth pervades the Mexican decisionmakers' claims to sociocultural similarities and historical ties binding Mexico to Central America, the apologies are at least useful in legitimizing Mexico's initiatives in the region. In fact, they are probably more than that and most likely make some small contribution to the formulation of Mexico's current set of policies.

The argument from ideological sympathy as a contextual influence may have more validity as a guiding principle in the conceptualization of policy. Mexican domestic policy has long since shed its "revolutionary" zeal, but the nation's foreign policy approximates the ideal more faithfully.

The arguments from economic advantage and strategic concerns and security interests define latent motivations. The historical record reveals the search for economic advantage in Mexico's Central American policy from the mid-1960's through the mid-1970's, but its influence has waned. Possible economic gains may assume increasing import in the future, but they are less consequential at present. The present policy is beginning to reflect the contribution of strategic/security interests, but they are still not crucial elements in the formulation of daily policy. If Central America's revolutionary contagion spreads to Guatemala (or southern Mexico), strategic and security motivations will certainly play an increasingly salient role in the policy nexus.

At present, political ambition complemented by ideological sympathy are Mexico's guiding principles and provide the keys for understanding the nation's Central American policy. Mexico claims a fairly consistent record of revolutionary propensities in its foreign policy and an important strain of its present Central American posture reflects that tradition. More importantly, however, the nation's policy reflects Mexico on the political make. The idea of bigness in Mexico has transcended the drive for

domestic industrialization and now encompasses the ambition for international prestige. Enhanced by the power of petroleum and facilitated by waning US influence in the region, Central America is the first testing ground of that newly evolving ambition.

MEXICO'S CENTRAL AMERICAN POLICY: APOLOGIES, MOTIVATIONS, AND PRINCIPLES

Several developments have converged to crystallize Mexico's emergence as an important political actor in the Central American region. In the first instance, the present stance reflects two decades of evolutionary transformation in Mexico's foreign policy from introspective and negative to outward looking and positive. Sparked by conscious initiatives during the Adolfo López Mateos regime (1958-64), the nation inched toward a more active posture in world affairs. Petroleum power, developed during the 1970's, provided an impetus as it armed Mexico with the stuff of international prestige and influence in the contemporary global equation. Finally, the events of Central America forced themselves upon the Mexican consciousness, compelling the nation's decisionmakers to fashion policies and programs in response to the threatening boil of the Central American caldron. As a Mexican commentator has it, "the hour of the true Central American liberation coincides with the hour in which it is possible for Mexico to operate internationally as an active medium power."¹

As Mexico's role in Central America grew, official and unofficial sources have confected a series of apologies and policy

positions designed to explain Mexico's intrusion into the area. Some of those explanations possess a certain ring of validity, but others are far less convincing. In still other cases, indeed, no mention has appeared of principles that logically inform the nation's concern with the Central American region.

This study posits and critically analyzes several apologies, motivations, and principles contributing to Mexico's increasingly active foreign policy role in Central America. It sets out a series of explanations, including those typified as sociocultural, historical, ideological, economical, political, and strategic/security. In each case, the argument is proposed; and then exposed to an analysis featuring its strengths and weaknesses. In some instances, the categories utilized for analytical purposes tend to be a trifle artificial because they obviously overlap. The cultural and historical explanations are cases in point and the political principles and strategic (or national security) categories also suffer from some nuances of redundancy. Nonetheless, the several categories define distinct and distinguishable parts of the larger foreign policy matrix and their proposition and elucidation contributes to an enriched understanding of the formulation and articulation of Mexican policy in Central America. As a final caveat, it should be emphasized that this effort is not essentially concerned with the substance of Mexico's Central American policy, but rather with the motivations and principles informing the policy (or policies) and the apologies devised to explain Mexico's activities in the region.

SOCIOCULTURAL ATTACHMENTS

At the highest level of abstraction, Mexican apologists are wont to wax enthusiastic about the sociocultural ties that bind them to their Central American neighbors. Those "well known . . . cultural affinities which exist between Mexico and the Central American and Caribbean nations are derived from geographic determinants and similar origins . . ." and presumably compel Mexican decisionmakers to a fraternal concern for their Central American brethren.²

Although the argument is diffuse, it flows from a premise that carries a degree of validity. Both Mexico and the Central American nations feature sociocultural value systems informed by the Hispanic-Catholic tradition. In a variation of that unifying bond,

mestizo socioracial configurations predominate in Mexico and significantly influence the makeup of most of the Central American nations, particularly El Salvador, Honduras, and Nicaragua. In still another gradation of cultural bonds, the indigenous peoples of southern Mexico and northern Guatemala derive from the same ethnic and sociolinguistic traditions.

Some elements of sociocultural interchange, moreover, may be seen as contributing to those fundamental bonds of language, religion, and tradition. Reciprocal tourism is rather well-developed between Central America and Mexico, although the flow northward is relatively higher than from Mexico to Central America. Mexican revolutionary art is well-known in Central America, Mexican popular music has effectively penetrated the nations to the south, and the Mexican cinema is popular in the area. Although exact figures are difficult to come by, finally, "important numbers" of Central American students have been trained in Mexico over the years.³ Combined with similarity in basic cultural traditions, that social intercourse has probably nurtured a modicum of community between the peoples of Mexico and the several Central American nations and may have some influence in how the Mexican decisionmakers have conceptualized the contemporary agony of the Central American maelstrom.

Conversely, several factors becloud and diminish the effect of sociocultural bonds and similar tradition as an explanatory device in fathoming Mexico's ambitions in Central America. The concept is too diffuse to offer precision in understanding current Mexican policy. Even if an ill-defined and amorphous sense of fraternity could be determined as playing a role in the way that Mexican decisionmakers think about Central America, its weight in the overall calculation of foreign policymaking is impossible to discern.

Moreover, some nuances of the role of sociocultural influences may well imply disadvantages for Mexico's ambition to strengthen its hand in the region. If the Hispanic cultural tradition tends to connote some contribution to unity, for example, the equally salient cultural strains of contemporary nationalism imply forces tending to widen the gap of understanding between Mexico and the nation-states of the region. The passage of time, indeed, tends to accentuate the peculiar characteristics of national culture and social patterns, thereby highlighting features that separate nation-

states rather than unite them. As revolutionary myths now being concocted in the area gain wider credence, those divisive qualities are more sharply drawn.

To push the argument one step further, cultural similarities may be a double-edged sword, as exemplified by the indigenous populations of southern Mexico and northern Guatemala. In both nations, the peoples inhabiting the border regions have suffered from a long history of neglect by the central governments and exploitation by the local elites. In both nations the native populations are beginning to stir and the respective national governments have been compelled to respond to their disquietude. It is certainly an exaggeration to suggest strong separatist movements in those areas, but a history of such initiatives exists and their resurrection is not beyond the pale of possibility. Writing in 1926, Carleton Beals described the scenario.

The similarity of Mexican Maya and Guatemalan Quiché cultures has led, during the 100 years of Mexican independence, to various plots looking toward the formation of a Maya-Quiché republic. On various occasions Maya Mexico has threatened to withdraw from the Mexican Federation; it has, in the past, applied for annexation, both to the United States and to Guatemala. As late as 1920, Felipe Carillo was actively plotting to foment a race-secession movement affecting all the territory from the Isthmus of Tehuantepec to Central America. Five states and territories, Tabasco, Chiapas, Campeche, Yucatán, and Quintana Roo, covering about 90 thousand square miles of mountain, plain, and marsh were to be wrenched away and ultimately united with Guatemala.⁴

The maturation of that scenario is, of course, quite beyond the realm of possibility for the immediate future, but it does suggest a flaw in the argument for sociocultural unity as Mexico formulates and implements its Central American policy. In tandem with increasing nationalism within the Central American states and in the context of the fundamental imprecision of the argument at the outset, it implies the insufficiency and inadequacy of the apology from sociocultural similarities as a viable explanation for Mexico's contemporary Central American initiatives.

HISTORICAL BONDS

The argument from historical bonds carries about the same mixture of validity and myth. Shared historical experiences are part

of the picture, but they offer little by way of understanding current intercourse, their depth is often exaggerated, and they also carry the seeds of conflict as well as harmony.

Carlos Fuentes, a well-known Mexican literary figure, sets out the argument. In lecturing US policymakers about Central America, he admits that "Mexico recognizes many legitimate US interests in the area."

But the United States must recognize that Mexico also has legitimate interests there. First, there is historical precedent. From Guatemala to Panama, Central America was part of the viceroyalty of New Spain governed from Mexico City during three centuries and for a few years after independence in 1821, the provinces of the isthmus continued to be a part of Mexico.'

Beyond the colonial and early independence periods, the historical chronical offers additional evidence of some degree of shared experience and historical contact during the 19th and 20th centuries. A Mexican commentary captures one element of "the historical parallels that have arrived at a point of confluence" in noting that both Mexico and the Central American "nations were the first to suffer the military, economic, and political actions of US expansionism."⁶ More directly, independence brought a long series of negotiations over boundaries between Mexico and Guatemala that were peacefully resolved and finally confirmed in 1899. During the third quarter of the 19th century, Mexico's Liberal reformer, Benito Juárez, played politics in Guatemala and later Porfirio Díaz was a "sporadic meddler in Central American affairs."⁷

Twentieth century history also reflects occasional examples of Mexico's involvement in Central America. Shortly after the turn of the century, Mexico joined the United States to encourage the peaceful resolution of international disputes amongst the chaotic Central American nations. The enterprise brought about the foundation of the Central American Court of Justice. Buttressed by US and diplomatic pressures, the Court worked relatively well for several years, but eventually fell into desuetude. Mexico's contribution to the effort ended with the outbreak of the Revolution in 1910.⁸

As the Mexican Revolution wound down after 1920, another short period of Mexican interest in Central America evolved. The revolutionary zeal of Mexico's leadership sparked it to carry the

revolutionary message southward. Described by a contemporary, the imperialistic campaign had Mexico "creating a conflicting sphere of influence [which] may have profound significance for the future history of this continent." Toward the end of this period of Mexican activity in Central America in 1929, Mexican officials carried on a short-lived flirtation with Augusto Sandino.⁹

While this chronology only adumbrates the major examples of Mexican-Central American historical intercourse, it does offer some sense of occasional interaction between the two which may contribute to the apologist's claim for bonds of shared experience. On the other hand, the historical record hardly chronicles ongoing, intimate interaction. Furthermore, several other considerations tend to diminish whatever sentiments of amity that may evolve from the historical record.

At the outset, it is obvious that shared historical experience does not necessarily lead to feelings of fraternal concern. To the contrary, it frequently has the opposite effect, catalyzing mutual hostility. The contemporary global scene is pockmarked with cases in point including the two Vietnams, the two Germanies, Iran and Iraq, and India-Pakistan-Bangladesh. In that sense, the record of Mexican-Central American intercourse conjures the same double-edged sword as does supposed sociocultural similarity. In fact, much of the history is conflictive and not harmonious. Looking to the colonial period, a standard history of Central America describes the reality.

Yet there were enough instances in which the viceregal authority attempted to intervene in Central America over the course of the colonial period that Central Americans developed some feelings of antagonism toward Mexico. The superior trade privileges and opportunities of Mexicans and the Central Americans' resentment of the viceregal status held by the inhabitants of Mexico compounded this animosity.¹⁰

Although some Central Americans reacting against the autocratic rule of Guatemala later welcomed the Confederation with Mexico, others opposed Mexican claims. Salvadorians, for example, fought the move and only succumbed to a Mexican army. Still later during the 19th century, the meddling of Juárez and Díaz catalyzed opposition in Central America as did the imperialistic campaign of the Mexican revolutionary zealots during the 1920's. In sum, the historical record gives pause in accepting the argument for bonds of friendship.¹¹

Evolving nationalism in the Central American region, moreover, corrodes the amity wrought by shared historical experience, just as it diminishes the unifying effects of similar sociocultural realities. Nationalistic sensitivities thrive on the mythology of real and imagined transgressions by neighboring nations. As the Central American nations fashion their several nationalistic ideologies, the fear of renewed Mexican ambitions in the area may well become salient parts of the nations' ideological formulations.

In the last analysis, furthermore, the apologists are incorrect in implying ongoing, intimate historical intercourse between Mexico and Central America. With few exceptions, in fact, Mexico ignored its neighbors to the south until very recently. Writing in 1981, a commentator had it that "until two years ago, Mexico paid scant attention to the tiny republics south of its border." Another student of the region dates Mexico's interest rather earlier, but still supports the point in claiming that "prior to the 1970's, its [Mexico's] regional posture in Central American and Caribbean affairs was low." Reviewing Mexican foreign policy in 1963, Jorge Castañeda, the present foreign minister, probably comes closest to the mark in dating incipient Mexican interest as crystallizing in the 1960's. Castañeda decried the "defensive" tone of Mexico's leadership at the time.

The postwar attitude of Mexico toward the outside world is still, however, one of mistrust and partial disinterest, and its foreign policy is mostly defensive and anti-interventionist. Until the inception of the present administration, when the international outlook of the country began gradually to change, Mexico's participation in the discussion of world political and economic problems has been, generally, reserved, cautious, and mainly defensive.

Drawing special attention to the Central American region, Castañeda continued that "the successive administrations made no great effort to assert a true political and cultural Mexican presence in Latin America or even Central America."¹²

As with the argument from sociocultural similarities, in sum, Mexico's present concern for Central America derives little from a tradition of historical interaction. In truth, the record demonstrates as much conflict as harmony and the particularistic implications of contemporary nationalism promise to accentuate those differences. Most significantly, historical intercourse has been inconsistent and quite limited. With few exceptions, Mexico has seldom paid much

attention to its southern neighbors. As for the present, Mexico's interest in Central America has existed only from the mid-1960's and really only been consciously intensified since the last years of the 1970's decade.

IDEOLOGICAL SYMPATHY

The ideological sympathy motivation as an explanation of Mexico's newly found interest in Central America differs a trifle from the others previously discussed. Apparently, it is not applicable to the entire region, but rather limited to the governments and/or peoples in Central America "in search of a higher level of social justice." In the conclusion to an examination of "new preoccupations and traditional notions" in Mexican national security, a leading Mexican scholar makes the point.

Concerning the situation in Central America, this brief re-examination of Mexico's traditional position in the Inter-American system puts in relief the grade in which sympathy for social change in that region is imbedded in the profound traditions of Mexican diplomacy.

President José López Portillo (1976-82) captured another nuance of the argument in proclaiming the "close ties uniting" the Mexican and Nicaraguan governments as deriving from their "common popular origins and their coinciding objectives of social transformation. Dialog is easy," he concluded, "between States which understand the nature of revolutionary processes." The argument, in fine, proposes that Mexico's traditional interest in social justice and its own revolutionary experience compel it to a special sensitivity to and sympathy with the forces of change now doing battle in the Central American region.¹³

While not without its qualification, the argument claims some validity. Even before the promulgation of the Estada Doctrine in 1930, Mexico evolved a recognition policy acknowledging the legality of regimes covering the ideological spectrum. Later, of course, it maintained ongoing diplomatic relations with Castro's Cuba. In his first address to the nation in 1971, President Luis Echeverría (1970-76) reiterated the posture in emphasizing the principle of "political pluralism" as guiding Mexico's diplomatic relations.¹⁴ Although his posture was less dramatic than that of his predecessor, President López Portillo pursued the essence of the

policy. A diplomatic tour in 1980, for example, touched a series of nations representing the entire political spectrum. In manifesting Mexico's new presence in Latin American affairs, López Portillo visited Brazil, Costa Rica, Cuba, Nicaragua, Panama, and Venezuela.

The historical record also counts other examples of Mexico's sympathy for "revolutionary" regimes and its opposition to the ambitions of the United States to control "subversion" in Latin America. In 1948, Mexico opposed the formation of the Inter-American Defense Council. Later, Mexico supported the Jacobo Arbenz Guzmán government in Guatemala; it voted against the organization of the Inter-American Peace Keeping Force in the Dominican Republic in 1965 and, still later, offered a strong defense of the Salvador Allende regime in Chile. Supporting that stance, Mexico welcomed significant numbers of political exiles fleeing Franco's Spain and rightwing regimes in Latin America—among them large contingents of Argentines, Chileans, Guatemalans, Salvadorians, and Uruguayans. In sum, Mexico's diplomatic tradition reflects a special sympathy for "revolutionary" governments and, in that sense, its present posture in Central America flows from established practice.

Conversely, several factors fly in the face of Mexico's heralding its ideological sympathy for the Central American left. The diplomatic record of support for revolutionary regimes, for example, is not so clean as it appears at first blush. The Mexican-Cuban equation is a salient case in point. Even though Mexico continued to carry on diplomatic relations with Cuba, the larger context of the relationship was far from effusively friendly. One commentary written in the early 1970's described relations as being "cool and formal" and specified a number of decidedly unfriendly activities.

Travelers using airlines to Cuba are carefully identified, and the information is turned over to the United States and Latin American intelligence services. Mexico has also made it difficult for Cuban books and propaganda to enter the country, and so restricted the Cuban news service, Prensa Latina, that it finally closed its doors.¹³

A careful scrutiny of Mexico's contemporary relations with the Central American nations reflects a similar combination of revolutionary and pragmatic postures. The revolutionary

dimension is exemplified by political and economic assistance to the Nicaraguan revolutionaries, measurable political support for the Salvadorian left, and a cool stance vis-a-vis the rightwing regime in Guatemala. Conversely, a solid dose of calculating pragmatism winds its way through Mexico's policy and calls into question official revolutionary rhetoric. Mexico continues to maintain diplomatic relations with El Salvador and both President López Portillo and Foreign Minister Castañeda have assumed measured tones in policy declarations on El Salvador calculated to maintain options as the uncertain struggle evolves. Through a petroleum supply arrangement in partnership with Venezuela, moreover, Mexico offers substantial amounts of financial assistance to the established governments in the area. El Salvador, for example, will receive nearly \$30 million during 1981.¹⁶

Without here offering a comprehensive critique of the Mexican revolutionary experience, finally, it is certainly logical to suggest that the Mexican elites' commitment to revolutionary change must be imperfect, at best. If not quite dead, the Mexican Revolution is certainly far from the robust vehicle for socioeconomic change that it was during the late 1930's. Products of that system, in turn, are bound to be governed by relatively conservative norms designed to maintain stability rather than nurture revolutionary change.

None of those reservations, however, should be interpreted to deny ideological considerations a role in explaining Mexico's contemporary policy in Central America. To be sure, the ideological sympathy is not so pure as the rhetoric proclaims, but the facts suggest that it contributes to the dimensions of Mexico's current policy in favor of rapid socioeconomic and political change. The diplomatic chronology demonstrates a solid strain of support for revolutionary regimes over the years and Mexico's present posture in Central America is consistent with that record. Although it has faded with time and been corrupted by economic affluence, moreover, the revolutionary ideal has not disappeared from the Mexican political culture. A strain of revolutionary fervor continues to inform the Mexican world view. The Revolution, to be sure, is still not much removed in time and vivid memories and personal attachments to its ideological ideals continue to influence Mexican policy.

In sum, the argument from ideological sympathy as an explanation of Mexico's Central American policy is imperfect and

partial, but it offers a more viable principle for understanding than either the sociocultural or historical apologies. Mexican policymakers are practical and pragmatic men, but they are also ideological men (if only as a result of their own propaganda) and they are motivated by those ideological predispositions as they fashion policies and programs in response to new challenges in the Central American region.

ECONOMIC ADVANTAGE

At present in Mexico unofficial commentators occasionally allude to potential economic advantages as contributing to the formation of the nation's Central American posture. From the mid-1960's through the mid-1970's, they played a featured role in the conceptualization of policy. Possible economic gains may become again increasingly important as the present decade unfolds.

In recent history, economic advantage goes a long way in explaining Mexico's rapprochement with Central America initiated during the 1960's. As Mexico's trade balance began to grow to serious negative proportions in mid-decade and as the Central American Common Market (CACM) began to take on increasing coherence, Mexican decisionmakers set out a new policy to strengthen relations. On different occasions, Mexico broached proposals to affiliate with (and dominate?) the CACM and/or to fuse the CACM with the Latin American Free Trade Association (LAFTA), to which Mexico adhered. Mexico failed in both attempts, but in 1964 a Mexican trade commission initiated a successful campaign to increase commercial contacts without formal economic integration. In its footsteps, President Gustavo Díaz Ordaz (1964-70) launched in early 1966 the first goodwill tour of the Central American nations ever undertaken by a Mexican chief of state.¹⁷

From that beginning, the die was cast. In early 1971, President Echeverría encountered "an unprecedented crisis in the Mexican balance of payments" and responded by meeting with the chief executives of Costa Rica, Guatemala, and Nicaragua to "explore the possibilities of increasing the exportation of manufactured products to Central America."¹⁸ Shortly after his accession to power, President López Portillo followed the lead of his predecessors in conducting a series of bilateral meetings with his

Central American counterparts looking to ongoing growth in Mexican exports.

As Mexico's economic recovery advanced during the late 1970's and as the instability of Central America gave way to growing turmoil, economic considerations in Mexico's policy have been superseded by other motivations. As captured by a Mexican analyst, however, at least some in Mexico continue to see potential economic advantage as a part of the larger unfolding scenario. After discussing sociocultural and historical influences, his discussion goes on to "more subtle" considerations.

The development of national markets, heretofore strangled by small oligarchies and feudal lords, would be able to extend the establishment of forms of economic cooperation [between Mexico and the Central American nations] mutually beneficial for the countries of the region.¹⁹

More specifically, the potential for economic advantage counts two gradations of Mexican economic policy, including general trade and investment and special considerations deriving from petroleum exports. Potential markets for Mexican exports and opportunities for Mexican investment define the argument from economic advantage. More than a decade ago, Mexican decisionmakers took cognizance of those possibilities and they continue to exist. Looking to 1979 figures, the Central American nations (including Panama) counted a Gross Regional Product of almost \$20 billion. Assuming a free trade area encompassing Mexico and its southeastern neighbors, Central America would increase the Mexican market by almost 20 percent. (Including the Caribbean nations would add another 54 percent increase.²⁰) In passing, it should be noted the collapse to the CACM offers Mexico more opportunity to make inroads into the Central American market than during the mid-1960's, when Mexico first began an economic courtship of the region's nations.

Petroleum exports and the concomitant activities of Petróleos Mexicanos (PEMEX) play a special role in the projection of economic advantage. Speaking in 1978, the oil monopoly's Director General declared Central America as a natural market for Mexican hydrocarbons exports. Thereafter, Mexico began to supply petroleum to several nations in the Caribbean Basin and capped those ad hoc initiatives with the comprehensive Mexican-Venezuelan arrangement negotiated in 1980. Now the keystone of

Mexico's economic policy in the Caribbean Basin, the arrangement connotes a generous program of assistance, but it also implies the capture of additional markets for Mexican crude. The point is made in an analysis of Mexico's Caribbean policy.

It is clear that Mexican/Venezuelan cooperation is necessary in order for Mexico to gain a Caribbean market for its crude. Mexico wants an assured regional market for heavy crude which it may have difficulty selling elsewhere. The San José Agreement stipulates that recipient countries must take 50 percent each of Venezuelan and Mexican crude, thus providing an entree for the latter.²¹

In addition to petroleum exports, Petróleos Mexicanos has launched other programs in the Caribbean Basin designed to increase Mexico's economic influence and advantage. In Costa Rica, PEMEX has been engaged in several programs, including technical advice and exploration. PEMEX has donated oil drilling equipment to Nicaragua and has been training Nicaraguan technicians. Other cooperative ventures have been negotiated with Cuba and Panama. In each instance, those initiatives increase Mexico's economic impact in the area and, to the point, hold out the possibility of future economic advantage.

Potential gains for Mexico in trade and investment with Central America and Caribbean take on added perspective within the context of Mexico's ongoing economic problems. Although the financial crisis of the mid-1970's has been superseded, serious economic conundrums remain. The current account continues to be in deficit, the foreign debt grows larger, the inflation rate mounts, and in mid-1981 the nation was shocked by the cancellation of petroleum contracts. Despite increased earnings from hydrocarbons exports, projections foresee a deficit of \$9.1 billion in the current account for 1981, including a \$4.0 billion shortfall in the balance of trade. The public sector foreign debt stood at \$36.1 billion in mid-1981 and a reliable source predicted that "all indications are that the overall rate of increase this year [1981] will have to be substantially greater than originally budgeted." New borrowings abroad may total as much as \$13 billion in 1981. In addition to governmental debt, the Mexican private sector's foreign debt amounted to about \$10 billion in mid-1981, for a total of public and private foreign debt of some \$46 billion. According to the *Latin American Weekly Report*, "many bankers predict that

Mexico's total debt will soon overtake Brazil's," the largest in the world.²²

In the midst of those several disquieting economic indicators, a serious shock reverberated through the Mexican economy in mid-1981, bringing into question the entire structure of the Mexican economy and established governmental financial planning.²³ An "emotional trauma" struck the nation catalyzed by a "virtual overnight downturn in prospects for crude oil exports." By late July, 16 of 36 foreign clients of PEMEX had suspended or cancelled their purchase contracts. For the first five months of 1981, the national oil monopoly averaged earnings of \$1.27 billion per month, but sales dropped off 27 percent in June (to \$925 million) and plummeted even further to 37 percent off the previous average in July (to \$800 million). As the year passed, the crisis was overcome, but considerable economic havoc had been wrought and a portentous precedent had been set.

In tandem with other nagging economic conundrums in Mexico, in short, the petroleum exporting crisis dramatized the vulnerability of the Mexican economy. Within the context of this analysis, furthermore, it implies some evidence in support of economic advantage as a factor in the overall calculation of the nation's newly found interest in nurturing its Central American and Caribbean neighbors.

In the last analysis, however, those several considerations involve a relatively minor economic stake in Central America and suggest that economic advantage is probably not an important part of the several motivations informing Mexico's current Central American policy. In the first place, the Central American market is comparatively small and poor. To make matters worse, the Central American economies have been buffeted by rising energy costs, reduced prices for their commodity exports, and economic dislocation and flight of capital resulting from political instability. At least for the short term, Central America offers little hope for significant increases in trade and/or investment opportunities. If economic advantage alone is a guiding principle of Mexico's foreign policy, initiatives in Central America promise far less potential than other areas.

Future trends may evidence gains, furthermore, but recent data demonstrate that Central America is only marginally important to Mexico as a trading partner. In 1978, Central America accounted

for only 2.6 percent of Mexico's total exports and a miniscule .43 percent of the nation's imports. While some increases in relative exports were registered from 1970 when the figure stood at 2.16 percent, they were hardly enough to invite the concerted attention of Mexico's policymakers. (Imports from Central America decreased from .62 percent during the same period.²⁴)

Economic advantage, in sum, appears to play a minor role in Mexico's current Central American policy. Although a certain continuity exists between diplomatic initiatives launched in the 1960's and Mexico's present efforts to nurture its southeastern neighbors, different motivations explain the policy then and now. Economic advantage has passed as an important catalyst for Mexico's policy. It may again become significant as the present turmoil subsides and sustained economic growth is achieved, but, for the present, other factors better explain Mexico's interest in the Central American region.

POLITICAL INFLUENCE

The political principles informing Mexico's contemporary Central American posture feature both foreign policy considerations and domestic political implications. The foreign policy part of the equation combines a logical extrapolation of the departures toward a more active foreign policy stance initiated in the 1960's and a response to the present turmoil of the Central American region. The motivations flowing from domestic politics focus upon the governing elites' need to respond to domestic pressures in favor of supporting the Central American left and opposing US diplomacy in the area.

Official statements are not wont to highlight Mexico's political ambitions in Central America, but their implications, along with unofficial commentary, provide sufficient evidence to make the case for the argument. The official line sings the praises of nonintervention and dwells much on the dangers of the "internationalization" of the domestic struggles in the region.²⁵

While that posture assuredly emanates from Mexican concern lest the internecine struggles of the Central American peoples expand, it also accrues to Mexican influence in the area. The policy posture portrays Mexico as providing protection from outside intervention. As with the oil supply arrangement and initiatives to

protect coffee prices and tuna fishing grounds, it projects Mexico into a role of leadership in the region. Furthermore, a stance against the internationalization of the Central American caldron maximizes Mexican influence.

Another variation on Mexico's diplomacy buttressing its influence in Central America evolves from its role as an intermediary between the United States and the nations of the region. Taking off from the Mexican-United States "special relationship" principle, the image holds that Mexican policymakers possess a more acute appreciation of the United States than others. They are, therefore, able to bridge gaps of understanding that sabotage discussions when the parties are not so intimately connected. President López Portillo gave testimony to the principle early in his term when he offered to serve as a "bridge builder" in inter-American relations. Later, he applied the principle in the context of the negotiations over the Panama Canal, differences between Cuba and the United States, and, in an attempt to mediate between Nicaragua and the United States.²⁶

The point is captured by a Mexican scholar in a long analysis of Mexico's Central American policy. After stating that "Mexico has neither an imperialistic vocation nor ambition in Central America," he allows that the present situation does "permit [Mexico] to play the role of confidential interlocutor, as much in behalf of the Central American peoples who struggle for their liberation as for interests in the United States who fight to impede [the peoples of Central America]." The analysis proceeds that "in this context Mexico is able to vigorously introduce its own national interests, taking advantage of the contradictions which overwhelm the United States." In other sections of the discussion, the argument from political influence is even more clearly proposed. In one instance, the analysis holds that "it is a fact that the traditional historical-cultural considerations which have prevailed in Mexico's relations with its neighbors to the south have given way to political and strategic considerations." Again, the point is made that Central America is a zone which pertains "to the national security and international political prestige of Mexico." Foreign Minister Castañeda utilized more measured tones in an interview discussing petroleum in Mexico's foreign policy, but the essential point is similar. The Foreign Minister cautioned that "energy sales cannot be reduced to the level of mere commercial transactions" and that

Mexico "should obtain something more than their monetary value in return." He then listed several considerations concluding with the criterion of "soberly-evaluated political benefits." Focusing on Central America, the Foreign Minister stressed that his interpretation of those considerations in foreign policy had guided Mexico's relations with the Sandinista government in Nicaragua. Reflecting those analyses on the contemporary Mexican scene, a foreign commentator reports that Mexico now describes the Caribbean Basin as its "natural area of influence."²⁷

Several contextual considerations lend further credence to the argument from political influence. They include historical trends in Mexican foreign policy, the relative decline of US power, and, more speculatively, the messianic qualities of the Mexican revolutionary ideology. Seen in historical perspective, in the first place, Mexico's increasing influence in Central America and the Caribbean is a perfectly logical extrapolation of almost two decades of evolutionary change leading the nation to assume an increasingly significant role in contemporary international affairs. Although certainly not encompassing unilinear development, the first steps toward a more open and dynamic foreign policy were taken by President López Mateos. The evolving policy was marked by several significant commitments, including a specific decision to affiliate with the LAFTA, a more implicit bid for expanded influence in Latin American affairs, the hosting of the 1968 Olympic Games, and a move toward an increased role in Third World politics through sponsorship of the Charter of the Economic Rights and Duties of Nations. In even more definite and theatrical form, the die was cast by Echeverría who initiated a campaign for Mexican world leadership involving a series of measures including his appearance at numerous conferences, his visits to even more numerous Third World, Socialist, and European nations, and his regime's establishment of diplomatic relations with 65 new governments.²⁸

While President López Portillo backed off his predecessor's flamboyant theatrics, he continued to pursue an active foreign policy after a short respite when he was concentrating on Mexico's domestic economy. Parlaying Mexico's newly found petroleum power, López Portillo negotiated with leading world powers and definitely established Mexico as a voice to be reckoned with in the larger global arena. Mexico's acceptance of a seat on the United

Nations Security Council in 1980 and its hosting of a North-South summit meeting in 1981 symbolized the success of the new policy launched by López Mateos in the 1960's and pursued by López Portillo in the 1980's. Coupled with a series of economic initiatives centered more specifically in the Central American region, that evolution of Mexico's global political policy led quite naturally to increased concern with the problems of Central America and to a conscious policy to further Mexican interests in the region. In short, it contributed the motivation of political influence to several other factors that had traditionally guided Mexican policy in the area.²⁹

Developments in the United States also contributed their part. Spanning about the same time period that Mexico's policy was evolving a positive bent, the relative influence of the United States was diminishing in Latin America, thereby creating novel opportunities for other nations to fill the gap. A recent analysis posits the point.

Mexico has changed internally over the last decade, and so has the international environment. Most fundamental, the decline of United States economic, political-ideological, and military hegemony throughout Latin America and the Caribbean over the 1970's in comparison with the decades of the 1950's and 1960's has enabled Mexico to assume an independent role in hemispheric affairs Today Mexico faces an increasingly 'Gaullist' or 'balkanized' international system in which it is not only possible but imperative for Mexico to assume a more assertive role to protect and foster its national interests. The dissolution of the Pax Americana is nowhere more in evidence nor more threatening to Mexico than in Central America and the Caribbean.³⁰

In a more speculative vein, the argument from political ambition is supported by a strain of messianic ambition that winds its way through Mexican revolutionary history. On the domestic scene, the message has been manifested by the educational reforms of the 1920's, the taming of the military during the 1920's and 1930's, and the resurrection of the communal ejido landholdings and the agrarian reform of the 1930's. Most dramatically, the messianic quality is reflected in Mexico's successful drive to industrialization, sparked by President Lázaro Cárdenas (1934-40), consolidated by President Miguel Alemán (1946-52), and pursued with manic commitment to the present.

In decrying the excesses of the commitment to industrialization, Professor Frank Tannenbaum had it that "the idea of bigness is

upon them." The Mexican elites were captured with the grandeur of "big plans" and "great industries." As that fascination manifested itself, Mexico pushed hell-bent the construction of sprawling steel mills, rationalized assembly lines, enormous dams, and sophisticated petrochemical plants. As a Mexican commentator proposed, "the Revolution produced a new breed of public figure, almost fanatically proud to be Mexican, and determined to drive that nation into the modern world."³¹

As a more positive foreign policy has evolved in Mexico, to pursue the point, the nation's elites have increasingly extrapolated the "idea of bigness" to the global arena. A new sense of aggressive pride has captured the Mexicans and suffused Mexico's conceptualization of its role in the contemporary world. President López Portillo is anxious for his country to exercise influence in international politics equal to its size, wealth, level of industrialization, petroleum holdings, and political sophistication. A sphere of influence in the Caribbean Basin, combined with a voice in Third World politics, is the point of departure.

It should be emphasized, furthermore, that Central Americans have long feared Mexico as its own "Colossus of the North" and Mexico's policies have intensified those concerns throughout the Caribbean Basin. As early as the 1960's, when Díaz Ordaz laid the groundwork for Mexico's present policy, "contact with Central American rulers grew rapidly enough to engender suspicion on the part of some political elements in the region that Mexico was becoming a subimperial power." During the 1970's, the Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago criticized Venezuela's ambition in the Caribbean. A leading scholar of the area proposes that "his verbal attacks implied that he was concerned that perhaps both Venezuela and Mexico were attempting to play pivotal roles in the Commonwealth Caribbean region" On the contemporary scene, the governments of Guatemala and El Salvador have both harangued against Mexico's interventionistic and imperialistic initiatives in the region and a particularly bombastic critique emanated from a Colombian Minister. He charged Mexico and Venezuela with "exercising a new type of 'dark eyed' imperialism in the Caribbean zone" and, in referring to traditional US activities in the area, explained that "imperialism comes not only from those with 'gringo eyes,' but also from those with dark eyes. What is happening," he concluded, "is that Mexico wants to continue

commanding with its imperialistic course in the seas to the North [of Colombia].”³²

In looking to a rather different political principle, finally, some focus upon the imperatives of Mexican domestic politics as contributing to Mexico's support of revolutionary causes in the Caribbean Basin. The argument states that foreign policy measures in favor of the left divert attention from conservative and authoritarian policies at home and, in the process, co-opt the Mexican left and legitimize the regime in the eyes of the Mexican people who have been indoctrinated with the rhetoric of Mexican revolutionary ideology. The analysis is shared by both the left and the right, at home and abroad. In analyzing Mexico's courting of Fidel Castro, one Mexican commentator interprets the policy as flowing from international economic and political ambition, but also “as a question of the internal health of the system. That is to say,” she continues, “that it makes foreign policy a legitimizing element of internal politics.” A conservative North American agrees in positing that “undoubtedly the reason for the Lopez Portillo favorable approach to the forces of revolution in neighboring countries” emanates from “the ability of the Mexican governing system and the PRI [the official party Partido Revolucionario Institucional] to substitute revolutionary symbolism for revolutionary action in the domestic political context and thereby absorb and neutralize most of the more radical left forces.”³³

While it is true, in the words of a Western diplomat, that “Mexican presidents always like to wave their left hand abroad and use their right hand at home,” the argument should not be overly-emphasized. As noted in the discussion of the ideological contributions to Mexico's policy, a nub of revolutionary commitment continues to influence the world view of Mexico's elites. The waning of that zeal does not necessarily imply its total disappearance. Even more cogently, the objective realities of Mexico's potential power have changed and reverberated onto the consciousness of the nation's policymakers. While it may be true that a revolutionary posture accrues to the maintenance of the Mexican system, it is equally true that Mexican foreign policy is at a crossroads. The moves to increased influence in the Caribbean Basin are much more than the cynical manipulations of Mexico's masterful politicos. Rather, they represent an incipient and

potentially profound new departure in Mexico's role in regional global politics.³⁴

In sum, the argument from political influence must weigh heavily as an explanation for Mexico's contemporary Central American policy. Provided a mighty impetus by the nation's sudden emergence as petroleum power and building upon two decades of diplomatic evolution, Mexican foreign policy is coming of age. It is additionally impelled by the latent messianic qualities implicit in the ideology of the revolution, facilitated by the relative decline of US influence in the region, and, finally, evoked by the sweeping changes affecting the area that have compelled the Mexican elites to begin to fashion a policy in response to the profound challenges (and opportunities) afoot in the Caribbean Basin. While sociocultural, historical, ideological, and economical influences contribute to the interpretation of those realities, they are eminently political and a political response is appropriate to them. In the longer run, other motivations may play a larger role, including strategic or national security interests, but, the contemporary scenario is characterized by political principles.

STRATEGIC CONCERNS AND NATIONAL SECURITY INTERESTS

The official line denies that national security concerns influence Mexico's contemporary Central American policy, but unofficial analysis combined with logical inference are clearly to the contrary. They demonstrate that security motivations contribute their part to Mexico's overall posture. The argument is catalyzed by several security imperatives and supported by Mexican initiatives to bolster its military capabilities. Ongoing problems in Mexico's southern states and the security of the nation's southern oil fields are the most important strategic considerations. The modernization of the nation's military is the most cogent point in evidence of the influence of national security's contribution to Mexico's policy.

Mexico's new oil implies several strategic considerations and national security concerns. The petroleum bonanza has catalyzed further economic growth and created novel strategic imperatives. Mexico's Defense Minister, General Félix Galván López, made the point of explaining the military's modernization program. He emphasized that Mexico's increasing wealth and industrial growth

had created new "necessities for protection and vigilance," making particular reference to the "vital installations" of Petr6leos Mexicanos and the Compa1ia Federal de Electricidad. "We have to give them security," he noted, and "for that reason we need more equipment, more means, and more soldiers."³⁵

The location of the new petroleum reserves is especially salient to Mexico's Central American posture. The fields are located in the southeastern states of Chiapas and Tabasco. Both states border on Guatemala and some of the fields are less than 100 miles from the frontier. The protection of these oil fields is clearly part of Mexico's larger Central American policy and contributes to the military's increasing concern with the nation's southern states. As a reflection of that fact, the most important maneuvers conducted by the nation's military in the last 50 years were held in the southern oil fields in 1980. Though less frequently mentioned, an additional strategic consideration in the south is the security of the transisthmian rail line, recently upgraded and destined to become a lucrative economic asset for Mexico as the 1980's unfold.³⁶

The oil fields and the rail line, however, are only part of the scenario in Mexico's south that connect to the nation's Central American policy in the context of strategic imperatives and national security considerations. A bombastic journalistic metaphor may exaggerate the point, but it captures an essential concern among some sectors in Mexico in declaring that "Central America is reaching northward toward Mexico like a knife pointing at the proverbial soft underbelly."³⁷ In truth, the area has always been unsettled and old problems have combined with new ones to exacerbate the situation. Traditionally, the nation's southern states have been Mexico's poorest and least developed region. The area also counts the nation's largest concentration of indigenous peoples, many of the same ethnic tradition as their brethren living in northern Guatemala. The developmental retardation of the region implies the continuing existence of large haciendas, socioeconomic exploitation, and political authoritarianism. Over the years, it has triggered occasional peasant challenges to governmental authority and, in response, repression of the local peasantry.

As the oil boom matured in the area during the 1970's, it sparked additional complexities as hundreds of thousands flooded the area in search of jobs. Those interlopers imposed stresses and strains on

the sociopolitical fabric of the region. To make matters worse, the exploitation of the area's petroleum riches also brought land condemnations, soaring inflation, increases in crime, environmental damage, water pollution, and unmanageable demands upon the local infrastructure. All of that, in turn, catalyzed an angry response on the part of the southerners, including petitions, protest marches, roadblocks, and the occupation of drilling rigs and construction sites. It is a familiar story: an economic boom sparking social dislocation leading to political protest.

But the dismal tale does not end there. Migrants from the Central American nations have added their destabilizing influences. As the Salvadorian civil war rages and as the Guatemalan guerrilla activities heat up, thousands have fled across the Mexican border to seek refuge and/or to find better economic opportunity. The entire southern region, in short, is experiencing unparalleled change and, in the process, creating novel challenges and implying potential security problems for Mexico City.

In response, the Mexican decisionmakers have launched programs combining carrots and sticks. The carrots encompass developmental programs including road construction, medical clinics, new governmental stores, and agricultural extension programs involving the distribution of new seeds and the provision of tractors at token fees.

The stick is more germane to the subject at hand. While the government's agricultural experts and social workers ply their trade, the military presence has also grown. The Mexican Army has assigned one of its most prestigious generals to the Chiapas zone and reinforced its garrison in the state. A *Washington Post* report quotes a "well-placed official" as estimating that the military post at Comitan grew from 3,000 to 8,000 men in early 1981. Remembering that the entire military establishment in Mexico numbers only a trifle more than 100,000, an increase of 5,000 men in one provincial post is obviously significant.³⁸

Beyond the strategic implications of the southern oil fields and the security considerations of the rapid socioeconomic and political change in the southern states, Mexico's newly launched program to modernize its military forms part of the context connecting to the nation's Central American policy. The point of departure is to understand that the Mexican military is assuming a more vigorous

posture than it has for more than a generation. In the now famous interview granted to *Proceso* in late 1980, General Galván waxed enthusiastic about the military's modernization. In responding to a question reflecting disquietude, General Galván brushed aside the apprehensions in praising the initiative on the grounds that it "will guarantee the sovereignty and integrity of our territory and all of interior missions which we [the military] have to complete." Warming to the task at hand, he pressed further in defending the military's modernization by proclaiming that it will make Mexico more "respected. The strong are more respected than the weak," he concluded.³⁹

Buttressing that positive rhetoric, Mexico's military is being encouraged by increasing financial support. From 1980 to 1981, overall governmental spending increased 38.6 percent, but projected allocations for the military ministries far surpassed that figure. The Ministry of National Defense, encompassing the army and the air force, was scheduled for an increase of 86.3 percent. The Navy Ministry's budget grew by 59.2 percent.⁴⁰

That combination of rhetoric and resources has crystallized in added presence and additional potential. Mexico's Independence Day celebrations in 1980 exemplified presence as the military surprised many when it demonstrated its new posture. A *New York Times* report captured the drama of the event.

Dressed in new combat uniforms and wearing green, red, and blue berets, about 8,000 soldiers ran the four-mile length of the parade to prove their fitness. And behind them came hundreds of newly painted military vehicles, including some carrying small rockets, never before seen in Mexico.⁴¹

New combat uniforms, flashy berets, and fresh paint reflect only part of the modernization program. The nation's cavalry regiments are trading in their horses for motorized vehicles. Mexico has acquired from Germany the rights to manufacture G3 automatic rifles and they are now being mass-produced. The state-owned Dina Nacional is manufacturing a Mexican designed tank. According to General Galván, the rockets paraded on Independence Day imply a "very modest" program, but they have been successfully tested, they are to come in four varieties, and they will be mobile.

The Navy and Air Force are also being improved. The naval minister has announced that he will renew fully half of the present

fleet. Six patrol boats have already been purchased from Spain with more to come. Spain has also received an order for "an undetermined number" of transport planes. Finally, the Mexican Air Force convinced the United States in mid-1981 to deliver a dozen supersonic F5 jet fighters. As part of the sales arrangement, US advisors consulted with the Mexican armed forces about necessary revision to its airfields to handle the F5's.

As those nuts and bolts of increased military might are assembled, Mexico has also turned to the formulation of sophisticated strategy. In the form of the Colegio de Defensa, an additional tier of advanced military education has been introduced to prepare Mexico's military elite for general office. At the highest level of strategic thinking, moreover, the Mexican elites have, for the first time in modern history, begun to think through the formulation of an overarching national security policy. Afforded wide diffusion by Defense Minister Galván's interview, the incipient policy debate is mightily concerned with the implications of Mexico's emerging role as petroleum power and with the nation's responsibilities and opportunities in Central America and the Caribbean.

All of that compels the conclusion that Mexico's Central American policy is informed by strategic considerations and national security interests, but the argument has its limitations. While it is true, in the first instance, that Mexico's south is experiencing serious socioeconomic problems, the potential for the spread of Central America's revolutionary contagion ought not to be exaggerated. The government is responding to the challenges and the Mexican system has a proved record for the effective handling of domestic political problems. As for the relationship between the military's modernization and Central American turmoil, the connection rings true, but other factors also form part of the explanation for the modernization program. In truth, Mexico's military has suffered from comparatively limited resources and is in need of repair. Equipment is scarce and outdated, the total force is relatively small, and the officer corps is not so highly trained as in Argentina, Brazil, or Peru, for example. Mexico's petroleum boom, furthermore, has provided additional resources and triggered competition amongst claimants in Mexico anxious to get their fair share of the financial pie. It is logical enough to see the military as having a reasonable claim to some of

those resources, just as other sectors in Mexico have vied for their piece of the new riches.

It is important to emphasize, in that vein, that the Mexican military is still quite limited in relation to other nations. Comparative analysis illustrates the point. Looking to the three "regional powers" who may logically be in competition in the Caribbean Basin (Cuba, Mexico, Venezuela), Mexico ranks lowest in all relative indices of martial might and in only one area measuring absolute quantities does it surpass Venezuela. Mexico is roughly six times more populous than Cuba and five times more than Venezuela, yet data for 1979 show Mexico spending well less than half for its military than Cuba (\$519 million versus \$1,168 million) and considerably less than Venezuela (\$706 million). In per capita terms, Mexico spent \$7.00 per head on its military, dramatically below Cuba's \$118, and Venezuela's \$52. As a percentage of governmental spending, Mexico's expenditures were again far below Cuba and Venezuela, respectively 1.1 percent, 8.9 percent, and 6.5 percent. Only in absolute numbers in the armed forces did Mexico surpass Venezuela, although it was still far below Cuba. In 1980, Venezuela counted 40,500 men in arms; Mexico, 107,000; and Cuba, 206,000.⁴² Even with the increased spending in the 1981 budget, Mexico's military still claimed only 1.4 percent of all state expenditures or 2.3 percent of the general governmental budget, which does not include allocations for Mexico's decentralized organizations and state-owned enterprises.

The argument from strategic considerations and national security concerns, in sum, contributes to an understanding of Mexico's contemporary Central American posture, but does not occupy a central role in that policy. On the one hand, the southern oil fields create new strategic imperatives and the change sweeping the nation's south hints at national security problems. In the same vein, the modernization of the military is partly informed by perceptions of the revolutionary contagion spreading north. Conversely, the Mexican government is clearly in control throughout the national domain and experience proves it capable of maintaining its grip. The military buildup, furthermore, is at least partially explained by influences beyond Central American turmoil and, in a relative sense, it is not much more than a remedial action for a military too long ignored as Mexico's decisionmakers spent their resources elsewhere. As the military modernization

program advances throughout the present decade, national security and strategic considerations may assume a more prominent role in Mexico's foreign policy. If the military's modernization program is combined with the success of Central America's left, national security may well become a crucial element of Mexico's Central American policy. At present, however, neither military modernization nor revolutionary threat is sufficiently crystallized to project strategic and security considerations into a prominent place in contemporary policy formulation.

CONCLUSION

Despite a pronounced policy line promulgating the virtues of nonintervention, Mexico is deeply involved in the international politics of Central America. The facts of the matter are crystal clear, but the motivations informing Mexico's role in the region are less clearly defined, even in Mexico. In large part, the explanations of Mexico's policy features unctuously proclaimed ad hoc and ex post facto artificial confections compounded by tight-lipped disclaimers.

The truth of the matter is probably composed of a partly conceived and semiconsciously articulated combination of the several influences examined in this paper. By way of analytical organization, they may be defined as contextual influences, latent motivations, and operable principles. The contextual influences informing Mexico's contemporary Central American policy derive from sociocultural attachments and historical bonds. The analysis presented here shows those influences to be imprecise, exaggerated, and fraught with negative nuances, but they are interpreted in Mexico as justifying the nation's contemporary policy. Although a sense of self-indulgent myth pervades the Mexican decisionmakers' claims to sociocultural similarities and historical ties binding Mexico to Central America, the apologies are at least useful in legitimizing Mexico's initiatives in the region. In fact, they are probably more than that and most likely make some small contribution to the formulation of Mexico's current set of policies.

The argument from ideological sympathy as a contextual influence shares some of the same imperfections as the sociocultural and historical apologies, but it may have more validity as a guiding principle in the conceptualization of policy.

Mexican domestic policy has long since shed its "revolutionary" zeal, but the nation's foreign policy approximates the ideal more faithfully.

The arguments from economic advantage and strategic concerns and security interests define latent motivations in large part, but they also lend substance to the dominant political principles informing Mexico's current policy. The historical record reveals the search for economic advantage in Mexico's Central American policy from the mid-1960's through the mid-1970's, but its influence has waned since then as other interests have increased in significance. Possible economic gains continue to exist within the Mexico-Central American equation, of course, and they may assume increasing import in the future, but they are less consequential at present. As for the contribution of strategic/security interests, the present policy is beginning to reflect their influence, but they are still not crucial contributions to the formulation of daily policy. If the Mexican military's modernization program matures and if Central America's revolutionary contagion spreads to Guatemala (or southern Mexico), strategic and security motivations will certainly play an increasingly salient role in the policy nexus.

From another perspective, however, Mexico's economic and strategic/military policies imply important corollaries to the dominant political principles guiding the nation's contemporary policy. In the economic sphere, Mexico's petroleum supply arrangement for the Central American nations legitimizes Mexican concern for the region and offers the opportunity for political leverage. As Mexico's military modernization program evolves, its political influence will also mature as military power contributes to the several other elements of Mexico's overall foreign policy posture.

At present, however, political ambition complemented by ideological sympathy are Mexico's guiding principles and provide the keys for understanding the nation's Central American policy. As noted above, in the first place, Mexico can validly lay claim to a fairly consistent record of revolutionary propensities in its foreign policy and an important strain of its present Central American posture reflects that tradition. The policy also mirrors the nub of revolutionary nostalgia that continues to inform the mentality (or spirit) of Mexico's policymakers. More importantly, however, the

nation's policy reflects Mexico on the political make. The idea of bigness has transcended the drive for domestic industrialization and now encompasses the ambition for international prestige. Enhanced by the power of petroleum and facilitated by waning US influence in the region, Central America is the first testing ground of that newly evolving ambition.

ENDNOTES

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2. *Ibid.*, p. 5.
3. René Herrera Zúñiga, "De cara al sur: México ante Centroamérica," *Nexos*, Año III, Núm. 28, April 1980, pp. 5-7.
4. Carleton Beals, "Mexico Seeking Central American Leadership," *Current History*, September 1926, p. 842.
5. Carlos Fuentes, "For Too Long, America Has Cast a Blind Eye on its Southern Neighbor," *Los Angeles Times*, January 4, 1981, p. 1.
6. Díaz, pp. 5-6.
7. See Beals, p. 842; Edith B. Couturier, "Mexico" in *Latin American Foreign Policies*, ed. by Harold Eugene Davis and Larman C. Wilson, Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1975, p. 122; and Ralph Lee Woodward, Jr., *Central America: A Nation Divided*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1976, pp. 153-154.
8. See Woodward, pp. 191-194.
9. For a fascinating discussion of Mexican activity in Central America during the period, see Beals. The quotation is from p. 839. The Sandino flirtation is discussed in Neill Maccaulay, *The Sandino Affair*, Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1967, pp. 146-160.
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14. See Errol D. Jones and David LaFrance, "Mexico's Foreign Affairs Under President Echeverría: The Special Case of Chile," *Inter-American Economic Affairs*, Vol. XXX, No. 1, Summer 1976, p. 46.
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16. For an analysis of the prudential dimension of Mexico's policy in the region, see Edward J. Williams, "Mexico's Caribbean Policy: Revolutionary and Prudential Dimensions," in *Colossus Challenged: The Struggle for Caribbean Influence*, ed. by Michael Erisman and John Martz, Boulder: Westview Press, 1982, forthcoming.

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18. Pellicer de Brody, "El Acercamiento de México a América Latina," in *Contemporary Mexico*, ed. by James W. Wilkie, et. al., Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1976, p. 449. Measured in increased trade earning, the campaign initiated in the mid-1960's paid dividends. In 1970, Mexican exports to the CACM totaled \$21.2 million and imports \$2.8 million. By 1980, Mexico exported goods and services worth \$228.7 million and imported only \$32 million from the CACM nations. The surplus of almost \$200 million was the only significant credit in trade for Mexico among its several major trading partners. For the data, see Banco Nacional de México (BANAMEX), *Mexico Statistical Data 1970-1980*, Mexico, D. F.: BANAMEX, 1981, pp. 57-58.

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20. The data are from World Bank, *1980 World Bank Atlas*, Washington: World Bank, 1980, p. 18.

21. The quotation is from Bryan, p. 36. For the text of the petroleum agreement, see "Programa de Cooperación Energética," *El Mercado de Valores*, August 11, 1980, p. 761ff. The Director General's statement is found in "Suscriben un Comunicado López Portillo y Odúber," *Diario de Yucatán* (Mérida), January 12, 1978, p. 1.

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standing of the formulation and articulation of Mexican policy in Central America. In this effort, the author is not concerned essentially with the substance of Mexico's Central American policy, but rather with the motivations and principles informing the policy (or policies) and the apologies devised to explain Mexico's activities in the region.

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